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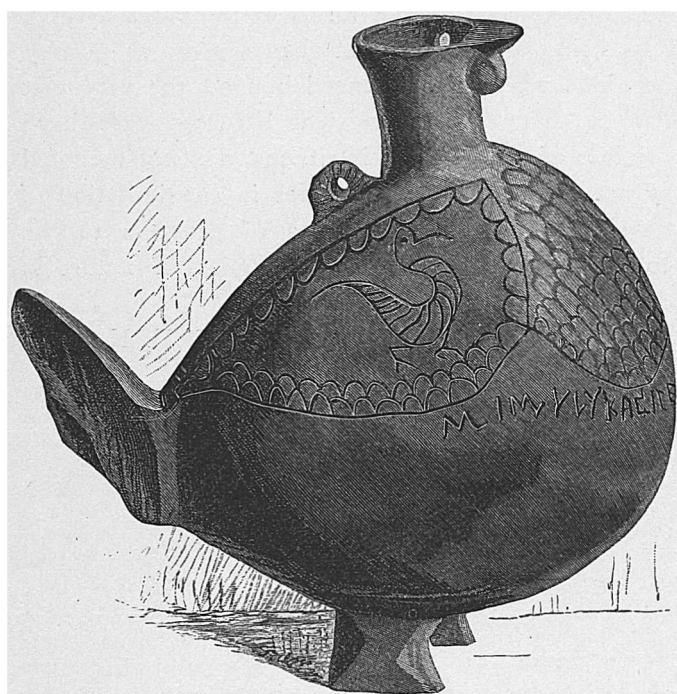
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## AN ANCIENT ETRUSCAN UNGUENT JAR.



ETRUSCAN UNGUENT JAR.

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON. (NATURAL SIZE.)

A FEW months since, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston received as a gift from Mr. W. J. Stillman the interesting little unguent vase or perfume bottle here represented. It had previously been in the possession of the distinguished archæologist, the Marquis Carlo Strozzi, of Florence. It was found in the territory of Corneto, a district rich in Etruscan antiquities, and especially noted for its painted tombs, which present in a long series a vast number of well-preserved paintings, ranging from works of an archaic and purely Etruscan character down to those of a late Romano-Etruscan period. The neighborhood is full of ancient caverns in the cliffs, and it has supplied to investigators a rich store of Etruscan antiquities.

This little vase is of the black unglazed ware of Etruria, called *bucchero*. This ware, says Mr. Dennis, "is of ex-

traordinary interest, as illustrating Etruscan art in its earliest and purest stages, ere it had been subjected to Hellenic influences. . . . It is coarse, unbaked pottery; its forms are uncouth, its decorations grotesque, its manufacture rude in the extreme, and it has little artistic beauty." It was made by hand, and not with the lathe. It was never painted, but was decorated with simple patterns scratched or stamped in the clay, or with figures moulded in relief, some of these figures, in late specimens, showing a considerable degree of skill in modelling.

As the engraving shows, this little vessel is in the form of a headless bird, the neck of which forms the mouth of the vase. The feathers on the wings and breast are indicated by rude scratches. But the chief interest of the piece consists in a brief inscription (of which a facsimile is here given), scratched upon it in archaic characters, running from left to right, which may be read as MIMULUKAVIIESI. In an Appendix to Fabretti's *Corpus Inscriptionum Italicarum*, published last year in Florence by Signor Gian Francesco Gamurrini, this vase is figured, and the inscription interpreted. Signor Gamurrini reads the words composing the inscription, *Mi mulu kaviiesi*, and translates them, *Sum Mulus* or *Mulvius Cavi filius*, "I am

Mulus, or Mulvius, the son of Cavius." "It is certain," he adds, "that this is one of the oldest monuments of the art and of the writing of the Etruscans, who, as I have elsewhere remarked (*Ann. d. Istit. Arch.*, Vol. XLIII. pp. 156-166), originally [as in this instance] wrote from left to right."<sup>1</sup>

The very early character of the inscription is further indicated by the abundance of vowels and the avoidance of the juxtaposition of two consonants, characteristics which, as Mommsen has pointed out, indicate the earlier stage of the Etruscan language, and are in sharp contrast to its later development, in which the gradual suppression of the vowels substituted a peculiar harshness for the original sweetness of the tongue.

The shape of the vase was one in common use by the Etruscans for the vessels to hold their unguents or perfumes. The form of birds, such as cocks and ducks, seems to have been favorite with them for the purpose. And the multitude of *narthekeia* that are found in the tombs indicates that the Etruscans were as familiar with the luxury of unguents and perfumes, and as fond of them, as the Romans of later times. The animal forms of the vases deserve notice in the study of comparative archæology, as being among the first shapes given to pottery by almost all the races in different parts of the globe who have advanced beyond the very first stage of pottery making. Vessels closely similar in shape to this ancient Etruscan vase have been made during an indefinite past by the aborigines of our own continent, and are still moulded by some of the Indians of New Mexico. They are among the first studies in the imitation of nature, the rude beginnings of an art which develops along different lines of progress to the idealized terra-cotta figures of the Greek, or to the no less perfect realistic copies of nature in clay of the Japanese.

C. E. NORTON.

<sup>1</sup> *Appendice al Corpus Insc. Ital.*, No. 771, p. 66, Tav. IX. No. 771.

